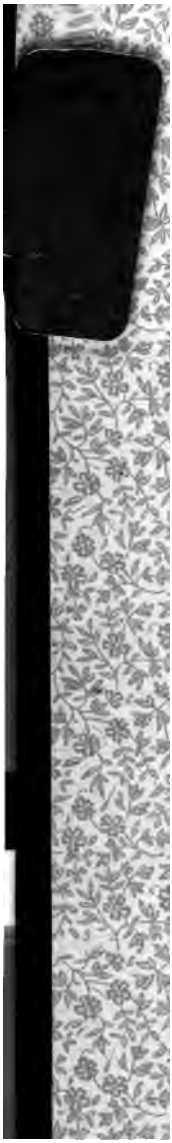
A Dream of Other Days

FIFE-COOKSON



A DREAM OF OTHER DAYS

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A ROMANTIC POEM

BY THE

LIEUT.-COLONEL FIFE-COOKSON

AUTHOR OF "WITH THE ARMIES OF THE BALKANS," "TIGER SHOOTING IN THE DOON AND ULWAR," "THE EMPIRE OF MAN," "MAN AND THE DEITY," ETC.

"A beauteous landscape that no brush can paint,
Bird's song which thrills beyond all human tone,
Bright rainbow, whitest snow without a taint,
The blue of heaven, nature, nature's work alone:
What mortal dares to vie?"

A Dream of Other Days.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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PREFACE.

I BEG to offer to the public the following poem. I can also claim to be the author of the metrical arrangement of the stanza in which it is written, for although other forms have been employed which resemble it, yet mine differs essentially from them.

J. C. FIFE-COOKSON.

LEE HALL, WARK,
NORTH TYNE.

CONTENTS.

A DREAM OF OTHER DAYS.

CANTO I.

FIRST LOVE.

I.

YOUNG Arthur Northwood paused and gazed askance
Through the bay window, as the summer day
Hung in the sultry noon. The green leaves dance
When through the woods and parks the breezes play
Around the stately Hall ;
There in mid-distance glides the winding stream,
Its sun-lit pools like glittering mirrors beam ;
While far as eye can reach upon the hill
A standard's folds, which lazy zephyrs fill,
O'er Trannon Castle fall.

II.

A handsome youth was he, whose ruddy glow
Told of the country sport and hardy game ;

Moustache and whiskers scarce begun to grow,
Light wavy hair, fair skin, and e'er the same
Truth couched in eyes of blue;
His shapely figure over middle height,
Of needs was boyish yet and somewhat slight;
Neat his attire, while still it studied ease,
Showed dainty care, the graceful wish to please
The world in manner due.

III.

"O sire! to age and wisdom I repair,"
So spake he, turning; "that your words may guide
And save me on the brink of dull despair;
Aid me, I pray, to win a beauteous bride
If she is to be won;
Where is the sacrifice I could command
Worthy of lovely Lady Ella's hand?
But should I fail, take back the vital spark
And end my life so aimless, cold, and dark;
My days without a sun!"

IV.

Thus spoke the ardent youth, with blushes deep,
To hear at first his secret soul avowed:

Though oft he murmured when awake, asleep,
And breathed the fondest vows, yet ne'er aloud
A confidant had told;
Presumptuous seemed it, rash, that he should dare
To claim in open speech the lady fair:
A child who thinks a midnight star to clasp,
May in a lake its shining image grasp
But find it void and cold.

V.

"Stay, Arthur!" cried his father, aged and worn,
"Nor stake upon th' uncertain prize your fate;
Nerved for defeat, be yet not overborne,
With tempered ardour and discretion wait,
Nor sigh for ruined life;
Full many a general worsted in the field
Again courts fickle fortune, scorns to yield,
Collects his forces with undaunted skill,
And shows, if not the power, at least the will
To conquer in the strife.

VI.

"But if your passion prove a hopeless love,
Still courage, duty, honour, bid you live:

Nepenthe sent with healing from above,
Borne by winged time, will surely succour give,
And leave you strong and sound;
As he who, tossed by storms, with sickness fails,
Sees the dread rock that nigh his ship empales:
The peaceful harbour safely gained at last,
Smiles o'er the scenes of ghastly dangers past
And treads on solid ground.

VII.

"Prepare yourself for long delay's chagrin,
You woo a lady fair, of noble name,
Yet constancy some happy day may win
If she should favour, long remain the same
Towards your courteous suit;
Your youth and hers a plea, e'en should she smile,
To bid you wait her settled wish awhile:
An Ensign in the service of the Queen,
You don but now the honoured Rifles' green,
And join next month in Bute.

VIII.

"Yet boldly challenge fate whate'er betide:
At Trannon, when Lord Corbury returns,

Avow the flame you can no longer hide,
Which for his beauteous daughter brightly burns,
And beg for his consent."
"Father, they come, perchance they overhear :
A telegram ! Strange news in terms most clear !
'Pray join at once at Portsmouth, as we sail
To-morrow night for India without fail,
On active service bent.'

IX.

"Such sudden orders great events involve,
Where rages red revolt in widening blaze,
Far Hindostan convulsed, her fate to solve,
By frantic Sepoys in their murderous craze,
Who break at last our yoke ;
Frenzied with slaughter grown, they scorn to spare,
Nor youth, nor sex protects, nor silvered hair :
'Cast the Feringhee in the sea !' they cry,
But while fair Ind again to free they vie
The land in blood they soak !

X.

"Then I must haste this very night from here,
Nor risk the fate of being left behind :

War's honours call where sounds the British cheer,
Love's gentle fetters can no longer bind
When duty points the way;
'T is mine, to every friend I beg you tell,
The wish without the power to say 'Farewell.'"
"I will, my boy. God bless you. May each blow
Ne'er fail to lay your fiercest foeman low,
And keep you safe, I pray!"

XI.

Hurried the preparations were of need,
His outfit ready then, in part or whole:
Light was the high-wheeled cart, and fast the steed,
Dressed in his service cloak, cap, green "patrol,"
A sword slung tight around;
And a small telescope through which the eye
The quartette moons of giant Jove could spy,
With a revolver ne'er in need to fail:
He journeyed southward by the evening mail
To join his comrades bound.

XII.

Fast steamed the train along the sounding lines,
With shrieking whistles into tunnels plunged,

Mounted the gradients, raced down the inclines:
Or leaning inwards round the curves it lunged
Obedient to the will;
And as the groom his steed with corn must nerve,
So with good coal the ready stokers serve,
The driver's reins the well-oiled crank and screw:
Loud throbs the engine's heart responsive, true,
And works o'er dale and hill.

XIII.

The panorama flies on either side,
So swift the view is scarcely seen ere gone;
They race the birds and e'en the breezes wild,
Through sunshine, darkness, fog, and moonlight wan
To thread the well-worn ways;
The busy merchant, lover to his fair,
Or rising lawyer to forensic chair,
The hurrying doctor with his well-earned fee,
And lettered bishop to his saintly see:
The iron horse conveys.

XIV.

Next morning Northwood reached the busy port,
Where stern Bellona dwelt on land and sea;

Each circling crest around displayed a fort,
And anchored war-ship shared with argosy
The shelter of the bay ;
But little leisure was there left to note
The lines by land or naval power afloat,
The troops commenced to mount the vessel's side :
An ocean city in her massive pride
The Indian transport lay.

XV.

To fend the piercing heat of tropic clime,
Painted all gray like phantom ship of story ;
There the blue-peter signals sailing time,
Here the white-ensign tells of naval glory ;
While panting to be free
There chafing hisses forth a steamy cloud,
And busy cranes hoist stores with groaning loud,
Upon the wharf and on the decks the throng
All eager hurrying raise a tumult long :
At last she seeks the sea.

XVI.

Starting with pleasing prospect, weather bright
In their swift-moving home, a little world,

They pass ere twilight round the Isle of Wight,
To the fair wind their canvas white unfurled,
Seated astride the yards,
The mariners with knife and cords to reeve
And bend a sail, with skill the task achieve.
As the last sailor ties the final rings,
Blithely a gay seafaring song he sings
And lingering gloom discards.

SAILOR'S SONG.

1.

Nor grieves my heart
From home to part.
Light come and lighter go :
No need to sigh
With tearful eye
To testify my woe.

2.

For many a day
I 've seen the spray
Cresting the waves before :

And heard the shocks
Of surf on rocks
Sound like the cannon's roar.

3.

While oft the gale's
Complaining wail
Has risen amidst the shrouds ;
As we lay-to
With sail and screw
Beneath the racing clouds.

4.

Plunged in the dip
The gallant ship,
When seas ran topmast high :
She struck the wave,
A shudder gave
With steam a groan and sigh.

5.

But breezes rough
To timbers tough,
What injury do they ?

I ne'er repine
Till weather fine
Succeeds the stormy fray.

6.

While absence brief
Ne'er fosters grief
And blither I return ;
A charm to friends
Short parting lends,
Makes love the brighter burn.

XVII.

When icicles depend from shroud and mast
In the bleak winter, then the bitter breeze
Chills him with thickest cloak who braves the blast.
The traveller forced to sail in times like these
Is driven from the deck ;
No pity lingers in the leaden sky,
He seeks for signs of change with restless eye,
Longs for the sheltered vales and cheerful towns
That lie behind the line of distant downs,
A disappearing speck.

XVIII.

But when the brilliant summer sun and drought
Increase each day the heat upon the land :
Then will the traveller joyfully set out
On the calm sea and quit the dried-up strand,
To breathe the cooling breeze ;
O'er Ocean, winds their purity regain
Lost in the crowded city and the plain ;
By the rich stores of vital power, their wealth,
Bring back the jaded, weak, and sick to health,
And granting life, they please.

XIX.

So Arthur Northwood on the transport stood,
Which steaming, sailing, cleaved the rippling wave,
Fatigued, desponding, trod the polished wood :
What from the pangs of hopeless love can save ?
Suspense to last for years !
Through falling darkness steered the vessel proud,
O'er England's coast night drew her sable shroud ;
Still flashed " Farewell " a light-house from afar,
Like a gigantic variable star
Which with the moon appears.

XX.

Forth from the open sky-lights music borne,
Tells of the cultured female voice and hand;
With themes of poets, love perchance forlorn,
Or by its triumph lighting bright the land
In heaven's celestial flame;
The knightly deed to win a lady fair,
The roving viking and the bold corsair,
With simple tale of touching melody,
A ballad of the field, the camp, the sea:
At length thus sung the dame:

A BALLAD OF THE SEA.

1.

He walks upon the barren shore
  Despair is in his eye;
For oft in vain he gazed before
  Upon that wave and sky.

2.

"My few provisions nearly used,
  Saved from the schooner's wreck:
No rescuing vessel near us cruised
  My signals to detect.

3.

"And she who promised me to wed
  Ere last I tempted fate:
Must know the wreck and think me dead,
  Will choose another mate."

4.

But as he spoke, amid the light
  Where sinks the sun from view,
There shone a tiny speck of white
  Upon the ocean blue.

5.

"A sail! A sail! Comes here the skiff,
  Or bears my hope afar?
Blaze now the bonfire on the cliff
  And aid my lucky star!"

6.

Bright flames the wood and parched-up grass,
  High towers the column of smoke:
They see! She turns, disdains to pass,
  'T is fortune's happy stroke!

7.

Heaved to, she anchors near the isle
  And quickly lowers a boat;
Then cleave the waves the oars awhile,
  Till to the beach they float.

8.

A smart young sailor springs ashore
  And hurries to his side:
But well he knows that face of yore,
  'T is she, his promised bride!

9.

"Your ship was wrecked, they thought all lost
  I joined a fisher's crew:
To bribe him search the lonely coast,
  And all for love of you!

10.

"'T was you who led me from the land
  To wander on the sea;
'T is I who give the soft command
  To bide at home with me!"

XXI.

The cheerful lights, the music, singing, games,
Attract the mirthful passengers below,
The gallant officers and charming dames,
Till only Northwood in the gloom of woe
Stays torn by doubtful thought;
His memory travels through the happy past,
Since first in childhood's days together cast:
She shared his triumphs when from school a boy
Until the budding rose grew lovely, coy,
More solitude she sought.

XXII.

Then last of all amazed, he saw above,
That star of beauty which his mind enthralled,
So Hesperus sheds forth the light of love:
Too pure for Earth, as if to Heaven 't were called,
Shines where we ne'er aspire;
Her joyous smile and gentle pensive face,
Kind truthful eyes, fine-chiselled features, grace,
Of well-turned form and carriage lithe, erect:
Her mind and person with each charm were decked
His ardent soul to fire.

XXIII.

From hurried, rapid travelling, far and long,
Full tired was Northwood and to sleep was fain ;
The drowsy sea-air soothed as sound of song,
Lulled gentle movements through the placid main ;
A folded sail lay nigh,
On the rough couch he sank, in peace reposed,
With pleasant languor soon his eyes he closed :
But still her face and form in mind he kept,
Sighed, breathed again his lover's name and slept
Beneath the summer sky.

XXIV.

O dreamless sleep, whoe'er has sung thy praise,
In earnest gratitude's exalted ode,
Ne'er did thee justice in his loudest lays,
For all the blessings by thy power bestowed
On body, nerve, and brain !
But midnight fancies, if we dream, are apt
To twist awry the schemes in which engraft
Our waking pleasures, business, hopes, and fears,
E'en disinter the ghosts of former years,
Till sleep is full of pain.

XXV.

Not thus with Northwood, and ere long he dreamed
Leaving his body on the lowly bed,
His love-attracted mind released it seemed,
Swift as winged fire to Trannon Castle sped,
A vivid scene and fair ;
There shine the evening sunbeams as of old,
The ivied towers they gild with light of gold :
His lady rests beneath the shady limes,
As often, he recalls, in bygone times,
But sorrowful her air.

XXVI.

With ever-kindly smile and cheerful voice,
Her thoughtful mother comes to bid her say :—
" Why, Ella, go not forth this evening choice,
Nor with your brother ride abroad to-day ? "
A tear her daughter hides ;
And answers coyly : " I am sad indeed
To Arthur Northwood ne'er to wish God-speed :
A man seeks fortune, through the world may roam,
But helpless women can but sigh at home
And wait what fate betides."

XXVII.

"I pray you write."—But scarce the words are said
When to his mind becomes the vision dim :
Ceases the voice, sea-breezes sigh instead,
Clouds o'er the scene, the forms which fade from him,
He seeks to overtake ;
Half-sleeping thinks he dreamed, yet would resume
Enchanted threads of thought now lost in gloom,
Then gazes on the peaceful sky and sea
Scarce conscious yet, nor knows where he may be :
At last he is awake.

XXVIII.

He rises, clears his eyes, with lingering doubts
Whether indeed that be the dream or this,
So real it seemed, but now the seamen's shouts
Dispel the fairy charm : the vision of bliss
Revealed his lady's mind !
Welcome, the answer to his dismal fear,
A friend for aye, but ne'er a lover dear !
Thus grateful, calm, and shadowy sleep, though short,
Revived his confidence and succour brought :
No more in pain he pined.

XXIX.

Of late he would, alone, his fate deplore,
A lover's hopes are lightly raised, o'erthrown,
Now grievous solitude he sought no more :
All wondered what good wind had fortune blown
To cause such revelrie !
And gayer yet, in mood more buoyant still,
When near Gibraltar's Herculean hill :
From Trannon echoed prayers for his success
A tale of sadness friends could ne'er suppress
Since he sailed o'er the sea.

CANTO II.

THE BATTLE.

I.

GOOD folk abound who hold our climate cheap,
Composed of fogs that breed the gruff catarrh :
By day the cheering sun may rarely peep
Through clouds, or shine by night the moon and star ;
But when abroad they roam,
Whether to Lapland's frozen coast they hie,

Or tempt the furnace-heat of tropic sky,
Or traverse nearer lands: soon lose their zest,
Declare at length our temperate climate best
And wish they were at home.

II.

So would the traveller, with no cause to stay,
Have pined amid the torrid summer glare,
Throughout the blazing, stifling Indian day:
When lengthy clouds of dust that hung in air
Signalled the march of troops;
While now the British reach the ridge of ground
Before the town, and bivouac around:
The Sepoy scouts within their lines withdraw,
That shield the capital of Brahmapore,
At which the eagle stoops.

III.

Long was the march, as if through England made,
And not where cloudless sunshine deals black death:
Footsore and weary, without water, shade,
Dense dust, and scorching air at every breath:
The soldiers struggled bravely on:
Buoyed by the ardent hope their foe to reach

On open plains or in the fire-swept breach,
Destroy red-handed those whose deeds appal :
To vindicate the British power, 't was all
For Albion, Erin, Caledon !

IV.

The rough campaign, the fight, and march, their mark
On uniform, o'er figure, face, had left
Proof of their wearing force and tenure dark ;
Want, suffering, hardship, had the gloss bereft
With many a rent and stain ;
The gay contrasting colours still might flaunt
On the thin limbs and 'neath the visage gaunt :
With gaudy lace and epaulettes of gold,
Of glittering peace parades and pomp that told,
They ne'er shall grace again.

V.

A tyrant conqueror of the world may scourge,
As Genghis slew his myriads for a freak :
But greater powers at length the ill must purge,
A roaring lion bleats, the strong are weak
And mighty men sink down :
So now at last descends the fiery sun,

Meets the tree-dotted plain, its course is run :
Dull like the old or worn and dyed with red,
Omen of deeds ere Sol next seeks his bed
Far, far beyond the town.

VI.

The British chief stands silent and erect
Before his lines, and close the landscape scans,
Nor slightest feature does his eye neglect :
So gladiators note th' uneven sands
Within the fated lists ;
The watchful staff mark Northwood's quick approach :
And seized by pickets at the first encroach,
A Hindoo Sepoy who his fate must choose,
With life and safety bribed to tell his news,
'T is death if he resists.

VII.

Handcuffed, he marched erect, on either hand
Sentries whose rifles had their bayonets " fixed ":
A corporal, directing by command,
Guided the guard, with prisoner betwixt,
The anxious chief before ;
Tall was the captive, spare, of darkest hue

(Fierce Indian suns his race's blood imbrue),
No longer wearing cloth of British red
But a mixed native garb of white instead
That spoke the trade of war.

VIII.

So quoth the native: "Lord, be pleased to hear!
Provider of the poor, to whom your slave
Looks up as humblest son in filial fear
To mightiest monarch of the land and wave!
The tale I thus recite;
My regiment was disbanded, I turned home
To tend the cattle and to till the loam,
By which bread-food and salt might be procured,
And hoped 'gainst hope when peace should be assured
Here tranquil to abide.

IX.

"But the wild insurrection spread and grew,
Loomed like the giant offspring of a dream,
And soon our ancient state to arms it drew:
I was compelled to leave the herd and team
And join the ranks of war;
Then quickly gathered here the Sepoy might

With cannon, rifle, lance, and sabre bright :
Soon learnt the toiling peasant to his cost,
Through homesteads plundered and by cattle lost,
That order ruled no more.

X.

" The ancient Hindoo race has little love
For Moslem rulers who usurped our land :
Full soon their iron hand, without the glove,
Would crush our souls if victory they command
And end the British *raj ;*
With five times greater force the Sepoys wait
Joined to the Rajah's troops : inspired by hate
And fiery *bhang*, concoction sent from Hell !
They vaunt the deeds of Cawnpore's crimsoned well,
And long their foe to charge !

XI.

" Those towering walls embraced the town of old,
Built to protect whoe'er the foe might be :
A Moghul suzerain in his greed of gold,
Fierce rival, Asian horde, and Pindaree,
A barrier grim have found ;
But since your powerful rule prevented war,

What need remained of shield that saved of yore?
So on this side the ancient rampart fell,
The prosperous city burst its parent shell,
Where now the trenches bound.

XII.

"One port there is in all th' embattled length,
Held by a mounted picket day and night:
The side so distant and so great its strength,
All deem it safe and wait the coming fight
Where lines the opening close;
Why then should *sowars* sacrifice their ease?
They rest within a shady tope of trees,
Which grows before the city's open gate:
Shun the hot guard-room, leave the rest to fate,
Smoke, drink, play cards, repose!"

XIII.

Scarce had he ceased and was again withdrawn,
When Northwood begged that he the gate might seize:
(Eager for bold emprise) at earliest dawn,
When wafted on the gentle morning breeze
The war should sound afar;
In native garb, alone, armed with his knife,

He 'd nail the gate, to close not in the strife,
Rejoin his party in an ambush near,
Then win the guard-room, though the cost be dear,
The foe's retreat to bar !

XIV.

Freely the wished permission was obtained :
Well might it prove to be a forlorn hope
If by mischance the foe in force remained
To raise alarm, with first assault to cope ;
Soon severed the retreat
Of the small British, stern, devoted band,
Once gained, the guard-room, more secure they stand :
Well might success the desperate risk reward
And fame for many an age the deed record,
Of arms a glorious feat !

XV.

Meanwhile there widely spreads the waxing throng
Of those that once the dreaded Corsican
Termed arbiters of fate, battalions strong :
Still grows the bivouac from whence began
At first the foremost line ;
And far away as distant view can strain

The winding columns of dust upon the plain,
Or instant sunlight flash on burnished steel,
More seeming endless coming columns reveal,
Which for the fray combine.

XVI.

Upon the lengthy ridge's counterslope
The soldiers bivouacked, well hid from view
Of the artillery in range's scope:
A distant cannonade they else might rue
While still on resting bent;
In line of columns arrived, 't was so it happed.
They lay upon the ground in great-coats wrapped,
Or shunned the heavy dew 'midst leafy screen,
Upheld by posts with woven boughs between,
Like lean-to, hut, or tent.

XVII.

Between each row of resting troops were piled
A line of stands of lethal arms composed
Of rifles, which upon their butts reclined,
Towards a common centre leaning closed
With the fixed bayonets sheathed;
In mutual support, and on them slung

Accoutrements and all the side-arms hung,
While the cased colours formed a central stand :
Two sentries stood to guard each column at hand,
And rouse at instant need.

XVIII.

The officers repose upon the flank,
Each trooper sleeps before his fastened steed,
His pillow, sword-hilt, stone, wood-log or bank :
Scooped hollow fits his form, the only need
To save from ache and pain ;
Straw, leaves, or grass, are held as luxuries prime,
'T is soon prepared, the bed at camping-time :
Between the cannon lengthy ropes are fixed
And the strong horses are attached betwixt,
Which drag the gun or wain.

XIX.

The sleeping warrior dreams of distant home,
Once more he views the haunts and friends of youth.
He sees the village spire, cathedral dome ;
Or midnight fancy nearer skirts the truth
And lingers round the war ;
Already in the morrow's fight engaged,

He joined the *mêlée* where it fiercest raged :
Or peace declared, promoted, rich to boot
With Indian *batta* and his share of loot,
His last campaign is o'er.

XX.

But ere the sturdy troops to rest retired,
Blazed the parched grass and crackling wood to cook
Their hard-earned meal, so small yet much desired :
And the blue smoke in curling spiral took
To upper air its way :
Long after the short tropic twilight by,
Beamed the reflected fires on mist and sky :
Around them soldiers sung, smoked, jested, told
Strange recollections of their wars of old,
Amidst the charger's neigh.

XXI.

Then if you ask, O reader, what the songs
Sung by the soldiers at the close of day ?
No dirge, the lofty ode to Court belongs,
Nor high-flown words but simple chose the lay,
Tender, pathetic, true ;
As " Bonnie Annie Laurie," loved of all,

Or lively with refrain, of field and hall :
Did I example some more complex theme
'T would be the fable song that such I deem
Of Æsop old or new.

SOLDIER'S FABLE SONG.

The Adjutant and the Crow.

1.

An adjutant there strayed
Upon a wet parade,
When the rain had made the turf a swampy lake :
A dainty bone he found
By chance upon the ground,
But a greedy crow would first the booty take.

2.

" O Prince of Birds ! " he cried,
" That food I first espied,
So deprive not thus your servant of his own ! "
Then swooping took the prey,
But ne'er he flew away,
For the giant seized and swallowed crow and bone !

3.

Comes warning on the wind
To Pandies snatching Ind,
Which the Company has regarded as its own :
" Be heedful lest there flies
A stork amid the skies,
That may promptly swallow down both bird and bone ! "

XXII.

King Chance, who loves to sport with great and small,
Capricious tricks with life and goods can play ;
By slightest wave his magic wand can call
Th' unknown to fame, the strongest to decay :
While few his actions mark ;
'T was doubtless " Kismet " ruled that Budroodeen,
Elahi Bukhs, two troopers, on that e'en
Before the fray, should give the Rajah proof
Of rebels' conduct, hold from work aloof,
Spurn discipline when dark.

XXIII.

The palace court-yard wall, on thieving bent,
They scaled, and ransacked every store unchained :

(The watchmen slept, with "Kismet's" will content)
Three bottles of champagne the plunderers gained,
No richer prey they found;
Then they returned where near the city tank,
Housed in an empty shed, they smoked and drank;
Until they viewed dawn's faintest, earliest signs,
The lighter sky with violet flowers and lines,
And heard reveille sound.

XXIV.

The pickets change, loud rings Muezzin's chime
That calls them forth to join their issuing friends,
For sleep or for carouse no longer time,
And now their squadron gaily outward wends:
Mars bids, Silenus spurns;
Drowsy, oppressed, unnerved, they quit their booth,
With fragrant hookahs would their fancy soothe,
Spread their small carpets on the guard-room floor,
Seated, the fuming, bubbling bowl they draw,
Enjoy the pipe by turns.

XXV.

The smiling Budroodeen said: "Brother, see
A Moslem good, our Rajah, yet his fare

Is the bright liquor of the Feringhee,
Their sparkling 'simpkin' sweetest, frothiest snare :
We save him from a sin ! "
Elahi Bukhs replied : "But ne'er forbade
The Prophet use of wine as yet unmade ;
Nor was champagne invented in his time,
So we are free to sip the nectar prime,
The bottles from the bin ! "

XXVI.

" Insh'Allah ! may 't be soon," they both agreed,
" That from th' accursed Feringhee's greedy sway
The groaning land of India shall be freed :
The sun of Islam's power shall rule the day,
Arise again in might !
For when the present desperate struggle o'er,
Our standard waves at Delhi as of yore,
The Moghul Empire's throne will shine anew :
We 'll crush the idol-worshipping Hindoo
And claim the victor's right ! "

XXVII.

" But who draws nigh ? A peasant. Look you, friend,
Your business, family, and name explain,

For upon these your fortune must depend,
To pass, be punished, or cast out again
From the beleaguered town ! "
So cries Elahi Bukhs, and Northwood calm
Bends to the ground in humblest salaam ;
A gesture makes as though to head and eyes
He 'd raise the lowly dust from where it lies,
Like a benighted clown.

XXVIII.

For Northwood, when he reached the city gate,
Through open doorways of the guard-room near
Observed the *sowars*, wrapped in warm debate :
They with his daring work would interfere,
But ne'er a word he spoke ;
His accent would betray, full well he knew,
So bowing would his onward way pursue,
Hide in a house, for 't was too late to turn,
And watch alert, so he might yet discern
A chance to deal the stroke.

XXIX.

The angry troopers rose and moved in haste
Down the stone steps which lay the guard-room round,

Few words Elahi Bukhs would deign to waste :
"Oh, deaf one, answer! Why not answer, hound?"
And raised his hand to cuff;
But Northwood's hunting knife uncased lay hid
Beneath his dress, his hand upon it slid;
And ere th' impending blow had time to fall
He struck the *sowar's* chest, whose figure tall
Sank dead : one stroke enough!

XXX.

As he who stoops to pluck some charming flower
But sees a deadly viper swiftly rise,
Close to his face, from where 't was wont to cower,
And hissing, threat to strike his very eyes,
Starts quickly up in fear;
So Budroodeen, amazed, "Ya Ullah!" yelled,
And springing back half drew the sword he held;
But ere the blade was from the scabbard brought
His spurs against the lowest step he caught,
And lost his balance sheer.

XXXI.

So falling heavily he struck his head
Against the angle of an upper stone;

Stunned, he rolled down the stairs and lay as dead,
Till Northwood forced his knife through flesh and bone,
And took his worthless life.
To hide the bodies in a barn away
Where none would chance to look beneath the hay,
In the gate's massive hinge a nail to force,
To join his ambushed comrades: 't was his course,
While waiting for the strife.

XXXII.

Long ere bright Phœbus in his glory boasts
That he did charm the murky night to morn,
The loud command, the tramp of marching hosts,
Tell that the British wait the coming dawn,
Preparing for the fray;
While yet unraised the veil of twilight gloom
Sounds on the silent air a sigh of Doom:
The Sepoy force perceive a distant flash,
Rushes a shell, it strikes with sudden crash,
The wreathed smoke drifts away.

XXXIII.

All wake, and some might cry "Sleep, life, farewell!"
Their souls, forth from the tenements of mortal clay,

Calls that grim summons like a funeral knell,
To the long night which knows no breaking day :
They gaze their last on earth ;
Yet none despond, each longs the prize to draw,
Not numbered with the slain, to win the war :
The nascent fiends will revel in the fight,
Glut their fierce natures roused to passion's height,
The battle gives them birth.

XXXIV.

'Mid each opposing mass the shot and shell,
Flying in ruthless showers, spread havoc wild :
Many a maid and wife, through what befell,
In smiling, gardened lands, with orphan child,
Will mourn the buried past ;
And now the sunlight's earliest beams reveal,
Flashing on buckles, arms of brass and steel,
Dim, distant lines of troops upon the plain,
Shedding forth skirmishers like scattered rain
Which the dark storm-clouds cast.

XXXV.

Far to the flank and rear new legions spread,
Ranged in their ordered ranks, one chief's desire

Controlled ; and on the firing marksmen sped,
Raced to each crest, from bank to bank came nigher,
And halted near the town ;
O'er a stout fence of earth their rifles true
From many a Sepoy gaunt the life-blood drew ;
Through the wide field there stalked the Scytheman grim,
Reaped the perennial harvest due to him,
His sheaves bestrewed the ground.

XXXVI.

But scarce arrived the British foremost ranks,
When issued from the Sepoy's furthest left,
Where screened from view till now by sheltering banks,
Five thousand Moslem horse, who fiercely cleft
The air with brandished sword ;
Towards the British open flank they race,
But fire from the supports arrests their pace ;
And their two leading lines are merged in one,
Ere their well-planned attack has scarce begun
Nor gained the wished reward.

XXXVII.

A swiftly-rolling cloud, portentous sight !
Of thick grey dust near hid the charge from view,

Save here and there the dint of sabre bright :
Till brought to bay it stood revealed anew
As impotent it raged ;
The groaning land roared 'neath the serried rush,
With a loud rumbling as when earthquakes crush
The rocky framework of our old abode,
Which reeled and trembled to the moving load
Till peace its pain assuaged.

XXXVIII.

Brief is the space before a smaller force
Accepts their gage and hurries to the fray :
For swift as feathered arrow on its course,
The British cavalry in grim array
For triple charge combine ;
The Sepoys wheeling rush to join the war,
The foremost troops encounter with a roar,
Heavier, the Sepoy mass the vantage keeps,
Still shudders from the shock, as 'gainst it sweeps
The British second line.

XXXIX.

On the huge seething field what weight could tell ?
There single combat reigns 'twixt friend and foe :

The falling charger, rider cast from selle,
With rapid wheel and turn, swift point and blow,
The scene that meets the eyes ;
Nor more the Sepoy's last reserves can move,
Though bold they charge and well their prowess prove :
While ever sways and strives the scattering crowd
With shouts, wild shocks of horses trampling loud,
And Pandemonium cries.

XL.

A cavalier was every *sowar* born,
With wiry length of limb the sword to wield,
Great power to grip his horse, nor from it torn
In the fierce fray when reaching far to deal
With force a trenchant blow ;
From childhood's hour like mythic Centaurs ride,
And light though tall their trusty steeds bestride :
Often that day they proved them taught too well,
By the apt scholar's stroke the teacher fell,
Nor laid his pupil low.

XLI.

The Sepoys followed battle-tactics still,
As learnt in British martial schools, the plan :

Advanced in triple fighting lines until
The rifle fire had merged two in the van,
And one reserve remained ;
Well served their double foremost strength at first,
As on the leading hostile horse they burst ;
But all their eager force had joined the war,
While the third British line, in ready store,
Still from the strife refrained.

XLII.

Oft had its leader by the cover side,
In the half light of English winter day,
Viewed the emerging fox, nor would he ride
Until he saw the quarry safe away,
Then raised the "Tally-ho!"
And midst the wild excitement of the run
His quick decision, dash, and skill had won,
Well had the sport and game his training served,
Matured his judgment and his action nerved
For conflict with a foe.

XLIII.

There sat the chief upon his eager steed,
Before his ranks, and coolly watched the strife ;

To seize the lucky chance his line to lead
And win the combat, greater prize than life ;
He charged the thinning crowd
When he perceived that he could rule its weight,
And with an onset strong and stern as fate,
Like crested wave he rode on victory's flood :
Each British sword was bathed in Sepoy blood
And won its laurels proud !

XLIV.

Meanwhile the British pause, the last assault
Awaits their left attack, that threads a wood ;
Onward it surges, doomed again to halt,
At length it wins a vantage high and good
To enfilade the rank ;
Fast fall the dead, the wounded shriek and groan,
Those who survive, in dire confusion thrown,
Begin to quit the trench by tens, then scores,
Scarce checked by their reserve which forward pours
To strengthen front and flank.

XLV.

But not for long the fresher troops rest firm,
Caught 'twixt two foes they soon begin to quail,

And thus of coming fate there grows the germ :
Disorder reigns, but one cure can avail,
The flank attack must cease ;
Then strives the Sepoy right more fiercely still
To seize the key of fate, the wooded hill,
From whence its captors, on the vantage ground,
Harass the native ranks beneath the mound :
Its galling fires decrease.

XLVI.

Ere in the trench the wavering troops revive
The British line has crossed with eager bound
The earthen bank : all vying, racing, strive,
With gleaming bayonets rush, their cheers resound,
They charge home on the foe ;
Some Sepoys fly, some, bolder, wait the shock,
Through courage, *bhang*, or faith all danger mock ;
They close in deadly strife, the scream, the yell,
The blow, the fall, the musket-shot, can tell
That furies fight below !

XLVII.

'T was passing strange in the exciting scene
To note the uniforms of striving foes,

Which erst the signs of brotherhood had been ;
But now lent fury, added force to blows,
Reminding of the past ;
The British would avenge the broken vow,
The conquered Sepoy struck for freedom now :
They strove who won together bays before,
Grant Heaven such ill-starred internecine war,
The first may be the last !

XLVIII.

The struggle quickly o'er, then who would spare
Base men with hands stained red in children's blood ?
Who heeded not the helpless women's prayer,
But cast them outraged into Ganges' flood
With tender babes to die ?
Those who escaped crowd every path and lane,
Or from the loopholed walls still fire amain :
The victors quickly gathering pursue,
To gain the cottages they charge anew,
" Now clear the huts ! " they cry.

XLIX.

To pass between the blocks, their chief commands,
Through open doors behind their way they maul,

Those which are firmly barred they fire with brands,
Or with the ram burst through the plaster wall :
At last the day is won :
The Sepoy right the rout in front descry,
They almost gained the hill, but now they fly,
Forced back into the town, to reach the gate
Press onward, dreading lest it be too late ;
But all in vain they run.

L.

As mountain torrents which forsake the crest,
And rushing, blustering, join their rugged course,
The streams converged, towards the guard-room pressed,
Seized in the morning by the British force
That close the gates have barred ;
And fire from loopholes on the stricken crowd,
Who, frantic turn to fly and raise aloud
A thousand yells of fury and despair,
Like starving jackals' howls that fill the air,
The wails of the ill-starred !

LI.

The British still pursue, then whither fly ?
In gardens, woods, and barns the Sepoys cower :

Hindoos fire houses, leap within and die,
Cremated save their caste in that dark hour,
Nor fall into our hands !
The soldiers search each nook and skulkers slay,
Tranquillity restore, the fires allay :
The peaceful citizens they reassure,
Protect the lives and goods of rich and poor,
All but the armèd bands.

LII.

When morning dawns, the Rajah mounts in state
From his broad palace-roof to view the fight ;
To see the mad Feringhees meet their fate,
And the sure triumph of himself and right.
His courtiers all attend,
Dressed in pure white of fine and graceful fold,
Laced dainty 'kerchiefs shake, sheathed *tulwars* hold
Show deference, display a well-bred ease,
And seek his Highness' smallest wish to please,
With bow, salaam, and bend.

LIII.

The Sepoy leader comes, he would report
His hopeful plans by which to crush their foes ;

Then hurries back his warriors to exhort
To firmly stand and ward the desperate blows
Directed at their lines;
But when the Rajah sees his troops in rout,
Hears of the captured gates from flying scout,
He with his courtiers from the roof descends,
Through mazy streets across the town he wends:
'T is fate he ne'er repines!

LIV.

Where 'gainst the city barrier buildings stood,
Swiftly they came and chose the strongest, best:
Mounting upon a narrow scale of wood
They reached the roof and next the rampart's crest,
From thence to slide down ropes;
A flying crowd had followed in their wake,
Who hoped to secret doors their path would take:
Not often do commanders of a town
Avoiding ports, the parapets climb down,
In lowest walls their hopes!

LV.

The courtiers bowed to "Kismet," calm, aghast,
At the wild flight and terrible defeat:

Remained devoted, deferent to the last
(Their Rajah's dignity no slight should meet)
Nor lost their ancient pride ;
Though ropes they had plain, stout, of English make,
Would bear three men at once and yet not break,
Chose for their chief a cord of state instead,
Of native work, with strands of green and red,
It broke, he fell and died !

CANTO III.

THE VISION.

I.

THE mortal conflict o'er, winged Victory crowns
Our troops who struggled round an open grave :
With gallant might, averted fortune's frowns
And won the smiles that wait upon the brave ;
The Herculean task
In the gigantic warfare to perform,
To rescue India from cyclonic storm :
'T is men like these can dare and do the deed,
With pride of race, to earn bright glory's meed,
In fame's warm glow to bask !

II.

Though Northwood all acclaim, with honour greet,
No longer buoyed by fierce delight and hope
To lay fresh laurels at his lady's feet:
For solitude he seeks the shady tope
Before the city gate;
"Could I but know that we will meet once more
When past the toil and fierce turmoil of war,
That she, still free to entertain my suit,
Will bless, at last bestow the wished-for fruit,
What tranquil joy my fate!"

III.

Thus pondered as he reached the sacred grove
Wherein an ancient fane to Brahma stood;
Whose image, pious tenets yet behove,
Was smeared with ochre, served with flowers and food,
By Hindoo votaries spread;
They prayed for power and gold, through ages vowed
Before that stone with heads devoutly bowed:
Were suppliants happier and more blest mankind,
When all was granted, or the boons declined,
For which the priests were fed?

IV.

The temple's origin, by legend told,
Whispering from distant ages dim and grey :
The votive promise of a warrior bold
If through the deity he should win the day,
And conquer in the field ;
' T was said when first the Hindoos issued forth
From Brahma's land that lay far to the North,
The cradle of their race, by sacred knowledge blest,
The holy Brahma—Varta, purest, best :
A city stood revealed.

V.

Then gazing on its strength their leader vowed,
If the fair land should by the god be given,
To raise a temple, with its priests endowed,
(Upon the scene where rival hosts had striven),
In honour of his name ;
And where the burning sun so fiercely shined,
Creatures and herbs alike from suffering pined,
A shady grove should spread its ample arms
To bless all living things with verdant charms :
And soon the answer came.

VI.

They 're Brahma's words upon the wind that sound :
" Thy pious prayer is granted, O my Son !
Until the day that I from heaven look down
And see thy people can my temple shun
Or serve at other shrine ;
For if thy children do this grievous wrong
A nation will avenge me, valiant, strong ;
Worship and know me by another name,
With varied sacred rites adore the same,
The only power divine ! "

VII.

He ceased : the leader inspiration drew,
Faith, courage, glory, roused his ardent ranks :
The horsemen charged like shafts from bows of yew,
The foot scaled walls and breach and won the banks,
Brave victors of the hour ;
They seize the city, change its name of yore,
In honour of the god to Brahmapore :
Conquer rich provinces, wide rule and wealth,
By open force and diplomatic stealth
Build up a mighty power.

VIII.

But when long ages passed of rich increase
The people turned from Brahma's stricter law,
Forgot his warning should they ever cease
To serve him only and none else adore :
No monotheists they :
Then swept a wave of conquest o'er the land,
The Hindoo kingdoms sank like crumbling sand,
Engulfed by Moslem hosts of fierce intent,
To spread their faith, to kill, to conquer bent :
'T was Brahma's destined day !

IX.

But what portends the uproar that draws nigh ?
A sound of cymbals, drums, and music-shells :
As anthem-chanting crowds move slowly by,
And add to braying trumpets shouts and yells ;
The morrow of defeat
'T were strange to wed ? Once more in life they bear
For bridal clad, the wife, with flower-decked hair :
The marriage-bed to funeral pyre they change,
On which the living with the dead to range,
Her dreadful doom to meet !

X.

Across the plain the long procession wound,
The Suttee in an open litter borne:
Her triumph marked by every sight and sound,
The flowery ornament and strident horn;
With many a lengthy stay,
For the crowd worship, benediction seek,
Excited women pray and wildly shriek:
Bareheaded Brahmins sing the hymns of death,
Shouting "Jey Kalee!" with their loudest breath,
"Great Kalee gains the day!"

XI.

Much smeared with ochre red, stands 'midst a throng
A log-built platform black from grease and oil,
Libations poured with prayer and votive song:
Beneath a canopy round which there coil
Fair flowers in garlands twined;
Thence flutter pennons, crimson, orange, blue,
While carpets form the couch of many a hue,
With incense, camphor, spread: and on it laid
The husband's effigy, full roughly made,
The nuptial tie to bind.

XII.

For though the rite prescribes the man deceased
Should burn together with the victim wife,
The husband's body neither friend nor priest
Could e'er discover since the recent strife,
In which 't is sure he fell:
Seen 'midst the greedy flames that grasped his home,
Reckless he strove to guard like jealous gnome
The fruit of ceaseless toil, his talents rich,
Hid in the chest or e'en the crumbling niche:
How doomed: Who more could tell?

XIII.

Amidst the smouldering ruins on the ground,
Where the fierce fires on thatch and wood had fed;
There lay full many a coin in heaps around;
With keys that lately bore the fated dead.
Then in a funeral urn
His relatives had gathered ashes ta'en
Where the devouring flames had burnt the slain;
Placed on the funeral pyre there stood the vase
With effigy and garland, votive jars
Of sweet perfumes and myrrh.

XIV.

Beyond the further outskirts of the grove
Young Northwood saw where now the train progressed:
Impelled by quick resolve, to thwart it strove,
Swift to the fatal spot he forward pressed,
Th' intended fiery grave;
And since their lot the battle did decide,
No more the natives bore their arms in pride:
So kindly fate its powerful aid had brought
To him who now in desperate venture sought
A lovely girl to save.

XV.

Upon his pistol's butt his hand he closed,
Called on the column to halt, the priests to hear,
The dreadful rite to say had none opposed:
They answered, "With our faith who interfere?
'T is the Sirkar's command!"
"By war," quoth Northwood, "rules our iron chief,
'No native gatherings,' 't is his order brief:
This lady (cause of all) I prisoner make,
Disperse your line or else its ranks I break
With any force at hand!"

XVI.

The haughty Brahmins scowled, the muttering throng
Gathered in angry groups with brandished staves,
But soon dissolved, nor dared to threaten long:
So melt the mounds of sand before the waves
Upon the ocean shore:
For on the level plain towards the sky
An eager British picket they espy:
Urged by its leader's voice, exhorting loud,
To hurry forward, reach the native crowd
That parts and is no more.

XVII.

Then Northwood led the rescued lady on
Through the calm shelter of the shady wood,
To learn how caused her danger past and gone,
The best provision for her future good,
Yet scarce alive was she;
Not one of those who gladly meet their fate
To save a lovèd soul from torture great,
Or join it in the regions of the blest:
But stunned and terrified, abashed, distressed,
She sank upon her knee.

XVIII.

Her stature less than middle height, nor yet
Had ceased its growth, her form of perfect mould :
Such delicate round outline to forget
Impossible, the eye must ere behold,
Obey fond memory's call ;
As fair her rosy cheek as in our South,
Red ripe her lip, and small her dainty mouth,
Straight and fine-chiselled was her feature's tone,
Dark gentle eyes to soften hearts of stone
And captive man enthrall.

XIX.

Her dress of fine white muslin shawls loose wound
The form displayed, or hid with graceful fold,
Here served as partial hood, there touched the ground,
Its edges trimmed with dainty lace of gold ;
Rare gems of largest size
Sparkled in necklace, bangle, belt, a store
To grace the festal day in many a score ;
Not to be wasted by the scorching flame,
But gathered ere the time for burning came,
The precious glittering prize.

XX.

He raised her gently, courage she regained,
As reassured, she saw no cause for fear;
Then modestly her history she explained,
Which to a frightful death had brought her near,
When he had saved her life:
"A Hindoo banker here my husband dwelt,
His influence wide throughout the state was felt;
He gave his gold to aid his country's cause,
To free broad India from the stranger's laws,
And fell in yester's strife.

XXI.

"'T was 'midst the fiercest summer heats last year,
As emissary to the great Hindoos,
He travelled by the Indus to Cashmere,
To move the powers their future lot to choose
With promise of support;
But Serinagur's chief desired to play
Both fast and loose, and so to while his way,
The flattered envoy 't was proposed to wed
To me, of royal blood: and home instead
Of league a wife he brought!

XXII.

"But how to fair Cashmere can I return
Since I through Providence escaped the flame?
Both there and here my friends would bid me burn,
To rescue honour from a widow's shame:
I trust alone in you!"
So saying turned on him her large dark eyes,
Like a masked battery opening by surprise:
Their influence is great in East or West
When ladies wish their willing slaves to test;
Would he fall captive too?

XXIII.

He pressed her hand, encircled with his arm,
And to his lips the ready words arose:
He fell not yet beneath wild passion's charm,
Nor spake what he intended to propose,
A warning viewed in time;
Down a long vista through the wood before
There sat his lover near her castle door;
Telling of faith and hope in absence long,
Inspiring with her strength to make him strong,
Under the spreading lime!

XXIV.

Abashed before the sudden mystic sight
Which high and pure had checked his near descent :
Astonished glanced around to left, to right,
Not Indian soil ! on Fairy-land intent
Of which such scene was born !
Yet there the Hindoo temple's walls and dome
His chance adventure to the mind brought home :
'T was there he heard the loud procession's sound,
From thence called forward, to the rescue bound,
By trumpet, chant, and horn.

XXV.

This is the sacred grove where Brahma spreads
Protection o'er his rescued daughter fair :
The flickering sunlight through the branches sheds
New lustre on her blush and coal-black hair,
Still decked with flower and pearl ;
Emblems of purity and of the rite
By priests that morn upon the victim dight :
No more the sunbeams harmless to enjoy,
Misguided flamens would for faith destroy
A young and beauteous girl !

XXVI.

Again he seeks the vision, sees no more
Than block erratic from the rocky hill,
Primeval iceberg's wreck 'midst ocean's roar :
And the sweet neem, with flowering shrublets fill
Alone the forest glade !
Whether a phantom or to form it serves
The passing fancy of his high-strung nerves :
Oft will he ponder, ne'er the truth may know,
Was scene he saw amidst the summer glow
But varying light and shade.

XXVII.

The vision gone, and yet there spread around
To him a feeling as if earth were changed,
And how dishonour now such hallowed ground,
By thought unholy ? Thus he sought estranged
A pretext to withdraw ;
But yet again the warmth that prompts in Spring
The birds to present mates their loves to sing,
Forget the soft liaisons of lang-syne,
Which erst could thrill the frame with power divine,
Quickens his pulse once more.

XXVIII.

As sign of diffidence the lady deemed
The sudden pause, too close upon his breast
To mark the haggard look of one who dreamed :
In charming bashfulness her eyes depressed :
Her graceful supple form,
With added softness from its light attire,
By thrills electric might a hermit fire :
Abandoned to his arms no more she spoke,
As silent ivy nestles round the oak
For aid against the storm.

XXIX.

But as a parasitic growth, a spray
May rest pretentious on the giant limb
Of mighty forest tree, nor make its way
Beyond the tender shoot : so 't is with him
Whose heart is sound and strong ;
While if decay has seared the perfect mind,
Then clinging vices with their network bind :
They spread, at length the sap of life they draw,
Smother with danksome leaves, exhaust the store,
And slay the being they wrong !

XXX.

Between the bonds of his allegiance true,
The gem he prized as life, and strong desire
For that which heated blood impelled to do :
Now conquered those, now vanquished these retire,
There raged a furious war !
As when the forces of disorder raise
In frenzied grip the torch to spread the blaze,
Nor palace fair nor cottage spares the brand
Till quenched by powers of order in the land :
At length the strife is o'er.

XXXI.

The Cashmere siren, who in vain allured,
Safely to far Calcutta would be sent,
Housed in a native home, her life secured
By those on charitable deeds intent :
Her harmless foes might search ;
There would she spend her days in peaceful ease
Where none could persecute, insult, or seize :
Cheered by the many brilliant sights and sounds,
E'en choose her faith where each belief surrounds
In temple, mosque, or church.

CANTO IV.

THE RIVALS.

I.

THOSE skilled in lore of planets had foretold,
Since Plassy's field where Clive the land had won,
The Indians yet would grasp their power of old:
When full a hundred years their course had run,
Then Britain's star would sink.
At last the fated sun has come and gone,
O'er mighty struggling giants it has shone:
The Company dies, though England's rule survives,
'Scapes, though it cost a myriad gallant lives,
The precipice's brink!

II.

Then Peace poured balm into the gaping gash;
Wise Power and Justice bound the bleeding wound;
India forgot her recent madness rash;
Prosperity revived where erst she swooned,
Cheered by good Fortune's smiles;
While kindly Charity arrived to aid,
And gorgeous Wealth its bounteous offerings made
Love mourned the loss of relative or friend:

Mars lingering scanned where hosts no more contend,
From the far British Isles.

III.

Calm in the council, wise and strong, he held
Firmly the reins of power and ruled the land :
Lord Corbury, Viceroy, who in times dispelled
The gloomy ruin that crushed fair Hindostan ;
While handed down to fame,
Posterity has known him sage and skilled,
On soundest basis the new rule to build,
To native races sympathetic, kind :
Who honouring his generous, noble mind,
Heap blessings on his name !

IV.

By chance there travelled through that sunny realm
A Russian youth of wealth and noble birth,
To count his acres would the sense o'erwhelm,
Rich ores were yielded by the generous earth :
Prince Gurieff was he ;
Who soon to Lady Ella made his suit
With manner charming, gay, and mind astute :
She hinted her affections were engaged,
He heard with outward calm and secret rage,
Who could her lover be ?

V.

Well used to gain the day amongst the fair,
E'en with a light attack to win the fort :
Then how could lady leave him in despair,
To whom in serious guise he paid his court ?
A terrible rebuff
To a young handsome dandy, who, though pale,
In frame and constitution sound and hale :
Nor his the conduct of a carpet knight,
A hero in the Alma's deadly fight
He gave each foe enough !

VI.

A Viceroy's aide-de-camp become his friend
And comrade on a pleasant shooting tour,
He sought as Mentor, and induced to lend
His shrewd advice in confidence secure,
Though light the counsel weighed ;
And yet 't was not in vain the answering word,
For thus Prince Gurieff a rumour heard
Of neighbourly regard in England, past :
And youth's impressions sometimes longer last
Than those of age more staid.

VII.

Perchance 't was Northwood, so a tale he spread
To mar his rival's hopes, that he had seized
A girl of Cashmere's royal blood, nor wed ;
Content if what he 'd ta'en to please, had pleased ;
But Cashmere's Envoy heard,
Sought from the Government the truth to gain,
Which summoned Northwood, who in high disdain
To Simla came : his menaced fame he cleared,
Showed that the lady fled,—'t was death she feared,—
Disproved the charge absurd.

VIII.

So when the cruel, dark aspersions all
Were scattered to the winds and nought remained,
To the Vice-regal brilliant banquet-hall
A chosen guest he wends, of favour gained
An honorary sign ;
And after to the great reception where
The chivalry of India met the fair ;
And native potentates might e'en be found,
Withheld by pious customs which surround
Should they be bidden to dine.

IX.

At the gay lengthy table banquet hold,
The guests in brightest gala garb arrayed
(Their uniforms blue, scarlet, lace of gold);
With ladies placed alternate who display
Each charm to grace the board;
Of face and form and elegant attire,
With pearl and ruby, sparkling diamond's fire:
A turbaned Kitmaghar behind each guest,
Attentive, quiet, quick, arms crossed on breast,
To wait upon his lord.

X.

Superb with flowers the table; costly plate
In gold with silver work of chaste design,
Whose worth and beauty well became the State;
And shone resplendent on the middle line
In group and centre-piece;
Of these the grandest lofty silver palms
'Neath which Britannia greets with outstretched arms
(On golden field the goddesses are born),
Here, smiling Ceres holding stalks of corn,
There, olive-bearing Peace.

XI.

In rows of silver candle-sticks there glow
The waxen lights well screened with scarlet hoods,
Tinting *couleur-de-rose* the belles and beaux,
And self-adjusting, ne'er the flame protrudes ;
Bright chandeliers abound ;
While from the broad verandah's shade there thrills
In varying cadence o'er the woods and hills,
Concerted music, solo song and glee :
Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne
Inspired no lovelier sound.

XII.

Abundant luxury is in the cheer :
The Indian salmon from the stream and pool,
Beef, ghram-fed mutton, flesh of many a deer,
From torrid plain, copse, brake, and mountain cool ;
Hares, dainty fattened quails,
Snipe, sand-grouse, partridges, and birds beside,
Wild and domestic, choicest food provide ;
While finest, richest wines the flagons hold,
And distant Wenham chills with store of cold
The cup that never fails.

XIII.

At the broad gorgeous table's upper end
Presides the honoured Viceroy dressed in blue,
While highest, brightest orders lustre lend,
Fair marks of merit which his vest bestrew;
His prime of years not o'er,
Well-suited he to rule an empire wide
Whose bark has stemmed but now rebellion's tide;
And fierce the restless race, within, without,
For ever threatening with demoniac shout
To kindle flames of war!

XIV.

A well-proportioned form and handsome face
With genial smile which was right good to see;
His manner formed with every pleasing grace,
Quite unsurpassed in ease and dignity;
Large, honest, kindly eyes
Beamed 'neath a forehead broad, inviting trust;
And yet strong mouth, chin, nose, and powerful bust
Conveyed a clear but silent warning fair,
Of ready forces which lay harboured there
Should any need arise.

XV.

The banquet o'er except the well-filled bowl,
The gracious ladies not as yet withdrawn,
Stay to enhance in value manifold
A compliment which else of lustre shorn ;
Two chieftains of the land,
Conducted by a red-clad aide-de-camp,
Entering the hall, approach the brilliant throng :
All save the dames arise to honour more,
The Viceroy greets the Princes near the door
And grasps each Rajah's hand.

XVI.

The elder ruler's face scarce showed two score
(One half in strong-willed personal power were spent) ;
Combined with life voluptuous signalled o'er
Eye, cheek, chin, lips, and form, though never bent,
Full *debonair* to see ;
He knew it well to judge from trim moustache,
Coal-black with well-curled ends : nor manner harsh
Or fierce displayed, and yet to reach the throne
His crime of parricide stood not alone !
Once there, a Solon he.

XVII.

Repays full many a weary mile of road
To view that Prince of Eastern majesty,
Wearing a double crown : the precious load,
Bright with each gem e'er born of land and sea,
To charm the dazzled gaze ;
Down to his shoulders fall his raven curls
Where twine broad shining threads of snowy pearls
Dressed in loose graceful garb of spotless white ;
Gay orders, richest gold embroidery bright,
His scarlet cloak displays.

XVIII.

His comrade, still a prepossessing boy,
O'er whom scarce sixteen summer suns have danced,
Too brief his handsome features to destroy
Or mar their cast, nor yet his eagle glance
Voluptuous ease can tame ;
His predecessor on the throne had thought
To join the rebels, foible dearly bought :
Revolt with British aid exiled the Prince,
And skilful ministers had governed since
In the young Rajah's name.

XIX.

Both chiefs in jealous emulation vied
To dazzle most with beauteous gems and gold :
And well their revenues the need supplied,
On such a fair occasion to uphold
The honour of their realms ;
'T is thus they sigh for dignified repute,
And covet added guns to their salute !
A ruby necklace equals one as rare,
Of pearls worth twenty thousand pounds, the pair
So bright the eye o'erwhelms.

XX.

Winning the competition, bore the palm
With dazzling brilliancy, a diamond brooch :
In the boy's turban the rich jewels charm,
E'en on the splendour of the Shah encroach
With vaunting rivalry ;
The glittering combs a lofty feather bear,
Joining in front the folded turban fair,
Whose ends hang back upon the pure white dress :
While the bare feet upon the carpet press,
An Eastern courtesy.

XXI.

Returning with them to the table near,
The Viceroy spoke in flowing eulogy :
" My honour 't is to-day to welcome here
Brethren in arms, who through the mutiny
Fought with us side by side ;
Long may alliance last so fair and true,
Most gratefully their aid we bear in view :
Well may each Rajah trust on us in need,
That we in turn for his good cause will bleed,
Whatever may betide ! "

XXII.

Then duly celebrates the cup the toast
With added honour from three lusty cheers :
All guests reseated, standing yet their host,
With courteous bearing either Rajah hears
The complimentary word ;
And at the end salaams, but still conceals,
With changeless face and mien, whate'er he feels
Within his secret mind and inmost heart :
Briefly replies the senior on their part,
In low-voiced tone scarce heard.

XXIII.

'T was thus he spoke: "Our humble aid was given
To freedom, progress, which from order grow;
For these the British fought, and ever riven
The land of India, if our recent foe
Had triumphed in the war;
We wish the mighty Government and Queen
A future glorious as the past has been;
Our thanks the gracious lord will not decline,
And to his guests who toast our health in wine,
Of compliments a score."

XXIV.

Thus with *éclat* the bounteous banquet closed,
To the reception room the dames retire;
And soon the joyous company thither flows
To interchange soft speech and list the lyre;
Broad corridors they thread
Where skins of tiger, leopard, bear, adorn,
While on the wall hang many a head and horn;
Denote adventures of a hardy race,
Victorious in war, that love the chase,
Spoils of the vanquished dead.

XXV.

Through the high folding doors the glittering throng
Enters the wide reception rooms so gay;
Opening by windows on verandahs long,
While opposite the sparkling wood-fires play,
A luxury of the hills;
The gentle dames already seated round,
Soon at the further end the chants resound:
A gallant sung the first with manly voice,
A lady wove accompaniment so choice,
With melody that thrills.

THE HUNTER'S SONG.

1.

I freely tread where fancy leads,
  No trespass bars the road;
Of little cost my simple needs,
  The forest my abode.
    CHORUS: A hunter's lot 'midst woodland scenes,
      A roving life for me!

2.

Toil gives me health, wild sports invite
  To breathe the balmy air:

The antler stag, the salmon bright,
  Who seek for better fare?
    CHORUS: A hunter's lot, etc.

3.

So far from busy hall and street
  I pass the joyous day;
With rifle, spear, rod, courser fleet,
  And hound to join the bay.
    CHORUS: A hunter's lot, etc.

4.

Where sunbeams glance athwart the boughs
  And glides the murmuring stream;
By night the stillness nought may rouse
  To mar the peaceful dream.
    CHORUS: A hunter's lot, etc.

XXVI.

At length they meet, and Lady Ella fair
Now welcomes Northwood with her friendship warm;
  So brightest shines the sun through clearest air
  By contrast with the clouds that bore the storm
  Whose dark walls roll afar;

But Gurieff remains a suitor still,
With sad forebodings Northwood's heart to fill,
How with such rank and wealth could rival cope?
More gloomy he becomes, with waning hope,
Which may his prospects mar.

XXVII.

But Venus breathed the secret in her ear,
With gentle tact his lady understood:
Skilled in the tuneful lay, there might appear
A time to end his melancholy mood,
Nor vainly sought she long;
Her gallant suitors stood on either side,
In graceful service both her courtiers vied,
A glance raised hope in her true lover's breast,
And the gay Prince at length withdrew depressed:
She chose this humble song:

SONG.

The Roses and the Daisies.

I.

The raging tempests sear
Proud roses which they pass;

While lowly daisies shelter near
  In safety 'mid the grass.

2.

When pluvial torrents pour,
  The roses fade and fail;
But rain the daisies harms no more
  Than the wild scathing gale.

3.

In beauteous bouquets bound
  The roses cease to bloom;
Untouched the daisies smile around,
  No envy deals their doom.

XXVIII.

In praise then murmured Northwood: "Were my lot
To hunt or tend the sheep on prairies wild:
The Indian's wigwam, or the shepherd's cot,
A fairy palace were mine ear beguiled
As thus with music's spell!"
Then met their eyes again in silent speech,
A glowing language no professors teach:

To speed the guests the smiling lady moves,
As hospitality the rite behooves,
And breathe a kind "Farewell."

XXIX.

O Reader, has your rapt admiring gaze
Feasted on Karnak's many-pillared halls?
Herodotus has led you through the Maze?
Dreamed you of Assur's sculptured palaced walls?
The transient works of man?
Think of the boundless canopy of green,
A myriad stems uphold its leafy sheen,
Mountains, with peaks, the white "abodes of snow,"
The crystal brooks, the glittering river's flow,
And match them if you can!

XXX.

Such is the scene where Himalaya's child,
The ice-born Ganges, cleaves Siwalix' coil:
And freed, it quits the Doon's broad uplands wild
To bless and fertilize the Indian soil;
O ever-verdant shade!
Home of bright birds of every gorgeous hue,
Where shine the oriole's gold, the peacock's blue:

The leopard, serpent, elephant, and bear,
The graceful deer, the surly tiger, there
Await the hunter's raid.

XXXI.

No eye to note sad failure's downcast look,
Or tongue to probe the wound ill-fortune rent :
If jealousy or fury ill could brook
A wight on curiosity intent ;
The Doon Prince Gurieff sought,
When Simla's soft delights of hope and love
No more could bind him to its heights above :
His suit had failed, he fled, and cursed the hour !
His hated foe had won the lovely flower
Of the Vice-regal court !

XXXII.

At last it seemed not e'en this far retreat
Could cruel fortune leave at his command,
For those approached who least he wished to greet ;
The Viceroy sought the chase, was close at hand,
Would westward move that day ;
So cried they at a village on his route,
Where turning south he 'scaped like hostile scout :

Towards the bleak Siwalix hurried, then
To shun the lines of elephants and men
He held his eastward way.

XXXIII.

But ere he turned across the pathway wild
Which onward to the distant Ganges wound :
By its rough side he saw that stones were piled,
Holding erect a staff with red flag bound
To mark a deed of death ;
Where harmless native traveller on his way,
Or frugal hunter searching for his prey,
By the fierce crafty tiger's sudden blow,
Far from his home and human help laid low,
Had parted with his breath.

XXXIV.

Perchance a band of pilgrims, to the shrine
Of Huri toiling, viewed upon the ground
Trace of the struggle in each well-known sign :
Torn clothing, staff, and *lotah*, scattered round,
And tinged with sanguine stain ;
Crushed grass and footmarks, sand displaced and scored
Point the fell spot and mournful clue afford

Where then the corpse to neighbouring hollows dragged :
Trembling they placed the stones with bamboo flagged,
And hastened on amain.

XXXV.

With pious zeal, Prince Gurieff's native guide
(And low salaam) increased with added stones
The funeral pyramid, that high and wide
It long might mark where lie the dead man's bones ;
And as they wended on,
So mused the Prince with darkly-clouded brow :
'T were better I lay there unless that now,
'Midst battle's roar I still may meet in strife
A hated foe, and take my rival's life,
Avenge the past and gone.

XXXVI.

At least the crowd avoided, peaceful here,
I may unmarked indulge the bitter mood ;
Where a white man ne'er treads for many a year,
And the bright Halcyon well might rear her brood ;
The deer I may surprise
Within these many glades, as now the sun
Has fallen half the height, his chief work done :

And the cool upland airs the heat appease,
There flows the limpid stream, here 'neath the trees
The couch from which they rise.

XXXVII.

But Fate so wills it Northwood seeks on foot
With native guide, for deer beyond the flank
Of the wide jungles where his comrades shoot;
And skirts along Siwalix' northern bank;
Then at a sudden turn,
After the simple forest track has wound
A brake of canes, high reeds and grass around,
He meets his rival with advancing pace,
Rifle in hand and fury on his face,
Whose black eyes flash and burn.

XXXVIII.

Fierce Gurieff knows, and so he well may pause,
A duel, combat howsoever fair,
Is interdicted by the country's laws;
He who survives the blame of blood must bear;
But if in self-defence
It would appear, then he can strike the blow,
Unpunished and triumphant slay his foe:

Does fate throw such a chance within his reach ?
Let lawyers argue and the priests may preach,
He bears the victory thence !

XXXIX.

Calling in French he howled an angry cry
(Their men no Gallic converse understood) :
" Consent to fight at once, O coward, or die,
Shot where you stand for vultures', jackals' food ! "
His rifle partly raised ;
But Northwood answering : " To refrain were best,"
Stood ready 'gainst surprise or 'vantage pressed,
While both attendants puzzled and appalled,
Discerned the quarrel and the fight forestalled,
Fled terrified, amazed.

XL.

Two loud reports rang forth, and at their sound
Prince Gurieff's native saw his master fall,
Nor paused again to look, from onward bound :
(Perchance to stay were death ! What needs recall ?)
And swifter still he sped ;
While Northwood's guide, beyond the power of sight,
Preserved his life, forgot his master's right,

Sought Hurdwar's sacred banks, from whence he came,
Though guiltless fearing to incur the blame,
And never turned his head !

XLI.

Cast down his rifle, Northwood forward hies
To aid, and marks the pallid, ashy cheeks,
But not the boding twinkle of the eyes,
Nor dreams Prince Gurieff still for vengeance seeks :
Quickly on elbow raised,
His foeman cries : " I gladly meet my doom
Can I but send thee, miscreant, to the tomb ! "
Again his treacherous weapon hurls the ball,
But failing hand and eye deny the call ;
Aimed wide, the missile grazed !

XLII.

The effort o'er, he falls, and spouting wide,
By sudden movements forced from injured vein,
Gushes through mouth and nose the crimson tide :
To breathe the vital breath of heaven again
His wounded lungs refuse ;
Though Northwood quickly raised the fallen head,
A corpse remained, the haughty spirit fled :

Protecting branches o'er the body bound,
He hurried to the Viceroy's camping ground
To bear the mournful news.

XLIII.

Calcutta, India's graceful City-Queen !
The war might roar beyond the Ganges broad :
But safely didst thou rest with placid mien,
Shielded by water from the barbarous horde
That thirsted for thy blood ;
In peace enjoyed good laws and government,
Although the Northlands insurrection rent :
For never have rebellious hands possessed
The Swan on Hoogly's beach that plumes her crest,
Saved by the sacred flood.

XLIV.

For not alone to stem the Western main
Four-armed Varuna mounts the monster steed ;
His river-loops the robber can restrain,
Or draw below the cords he bears, at need,
With snaky noose to bind ;
Well fitting that the Lord of wave and wind,
Which bore the British troops to conquer Hind,

E'en though a foreign god of mythic mould,
Should recognise his constant votaries bold
And be to Britons kind.

XLV.

Changed is the scene since on the fertile plain
Charnock fixed here the seat of British power,
Where pilgrims worshipped at an ancient fane,
And gave *Thee* birth in a propitious hour !
But darker 't is to dwell
Upon Suráj-ud-Daulá's fierce attack,
A captured city and the ruthless sack :
The vault where penned the champions who had fought
For the defence of modern Kali-ghaut,
The Black-hole's deadly cell.

XLVI.

Then in the hour of need there came the man,
When conquering Clive regained the captured prize :
Which soon of Indian cities led the van,
With palaced beauty to delight the eyes
And shelter rich and poor ;
As a huge tree which in the root and seed
Nor shows the sheltering leaf nor fruit to feed,

And wanton foot may crush, but if 't is spared,
Its food will bless, its grateful shade is shared,
Where else were barren moor.

XLVII.

There Kali ruled the scene in ancient shrine,
Symbol of death and devastating force :
Now sylvan beauty, human art combine,
Spreads the broad street, the drive, the rail, the course,
Thronged by a busy crowd ;
Which Eastern fancy tints with many a hue,
White clothes (belts, turbans, orange, red, and blue) :
Palatial buildings stand 'midst gardened charms,
Where flower the shrubs and spread the lofty palms,
The seat of empire proud.

XLVIII.

Here mighty justice held her even scale
To weigh the charge that Northwood Gurieff slew :
Could blame now brand him, or defence prevail ?
Would vengeance crush or life inspire anew,
And end his sad suspense ?
The first inquiry o'er, pregnant with hope,
'T was held at Dehra on the mountain's slope :

His tale supported by the force of truth,
Had in the people's eyes the gallant youth
Cleared to his joy intense.

XLIX.

But now the coolie swore the Prince expired,
Just as the native watched the deed was done,
And that by chance his falling master fired,
High in the air the leaden bullet spun :
A false and fancy tale ;
For Northwood stayed the fatal bolt until
His foe had aimed with clear intent to kill :
The slur of murder, slaughter, how remove,
And lying words so lightly said disprove ?
What witness could avail ?

L.

Then spake the wight : "Ere this lord's rifle flashed,
Sounding with many an echo through the wood,
Back from his hand some weighty thing he cast
Against an earthen bank near which he stood,
That caused the dust to fly."
"'T was there then struck Prince Gurieff's first-fired ball,"
The prisoner cried : "Truth saves life, honor, all !

I pray for time that men may search the ground,
Its billet there the dead man's bullet found ! "
Wild triumph filled his eye.

LI.

The court adjourned, the prisoner sent in ward
Of trusty officers to point the spot
On which he stood, where spread an opening broad,
The moment that he fired the fatal shot :
With search the scene they find ;
And next the native witness leads them where
The little cloud of sand dispersed in air :
There now remains a hollow in the brae
From which they cleared the broken earth away
And found the ball behind !

LII.

Could I do justice, reader, to the theme,
E'en faintly to pourtray the joyful heart
Of either lover, when the judges deem
Northwood has proved he bore a blameless part
The day Prince Gurieff fell ;
Or mirror married bliss the rich reward
For warrior's gallant service with his sword,

The guerdon of a nature, constant, true,
Which taught the happy youth success to woo,
I would the story tell.

LIII.

A beauteous landscape that no brush can paint,
Bird's song which thrills beyond all human tone,
Bright realms of whitest snow without a taint,
The blue of heaven, pure Nature's work alone,
What mortal dares to vie?
But if my lyre, though touched with little power,
Could bid you while away perchance the hour,
Then not in vain the minstrel's effort spent:
True sped the shaft from bow but feebly bent
And aimed with erring eye.

THE END.